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ABSTRACT

Born in the aftermath of social upheaval in 1970, Servol (Service Volunteered for All) is a grassroots community development organization working with preschoolers and adolescents in the Caribbean nations of Trinidad and Tobago. This booklet describes the efforts and successes of this program, founded through the intervention of a Catholic priest and science teacher. The introductory chapter provides an overview of Servol and its three programs. The second chapter describes the circumstances that led to the creation of Servol; the third chapter discusses its relevance in the current national context. The next chapters describe: (1) the Life Centers, which put into action the idea of integrated education; (2) the Adolescent Development Program (ADP), which serves the emotional, psychological, educational, and vocational needs of adolescents; (3) the training of ADP instructors; (4) Fund Aid, the credit arm of Servol; (4) the Early Childhood Education Program (ECEP), which is parent-oriented and community-based; (5) the preschool teacher-training course; (6) collaboration with the government for funds; (7) funding from the private sector and the work of the life centers; (8) the relationship between the board of education and the community; and (9) replicating the Servol experience in the formal education system. The concluding chapter stresses the need for a responsive society in which education is supported by the community. Three features of the booklet are a description of how adolescent peer counseling works, the effects of inappropriate parenting practices, and the importance of dramatic play in early childhood programs. Milestones in the evolution of the Servol program are also listed. Contains 21 references. (BAC)

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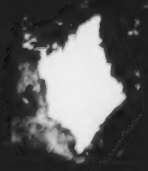
ON THE RIGHT TRACK

Servol's early childhood and adolescent development programmes in Trinidad and Tobago



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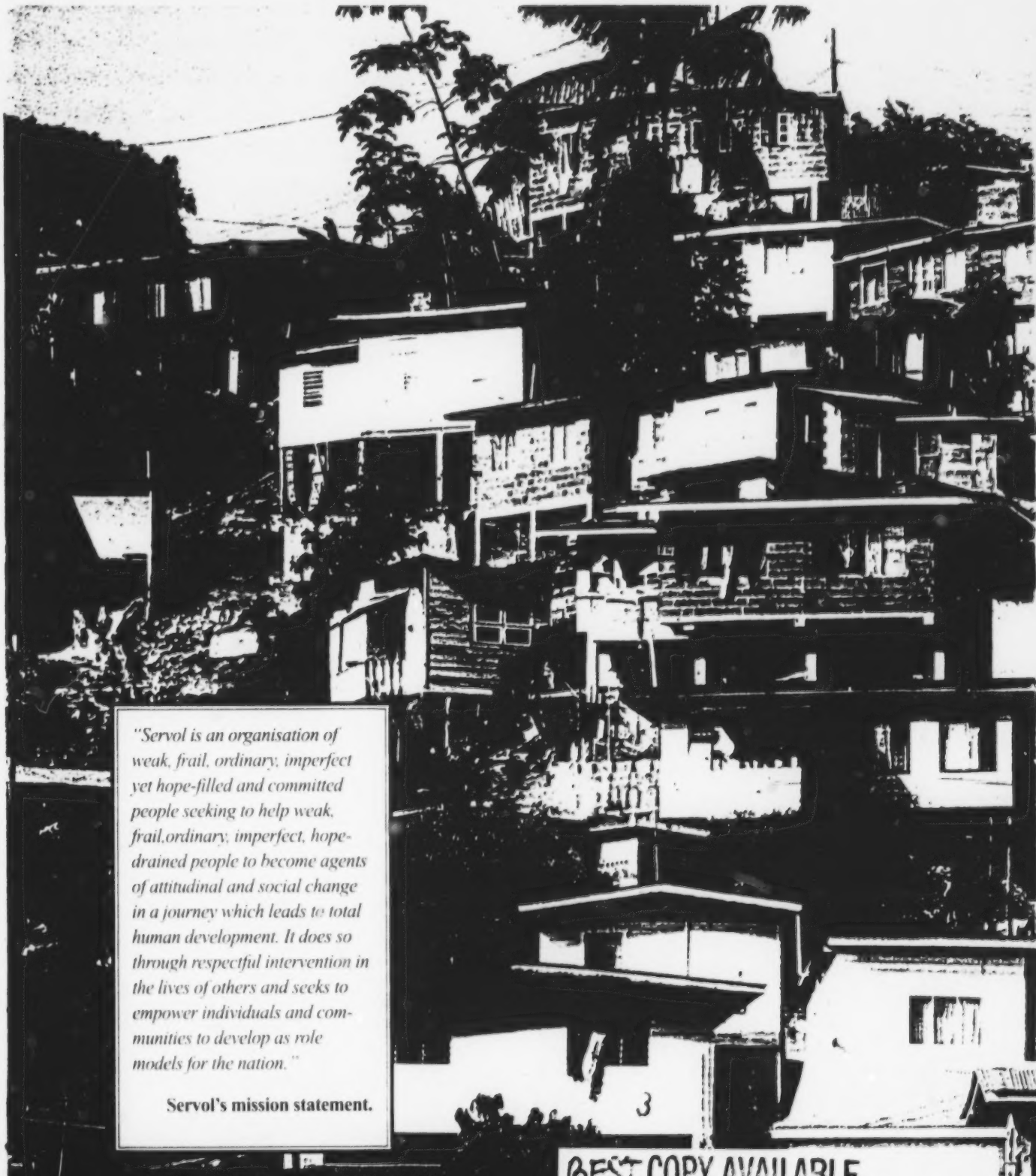

"Servol is an organisation of weak, frail, ordinary, imperfect yet hope-filled and committed people seeking to help weak, frail,ordinary, imperfect, hope-drained people to become agents of attitudinal and social change in a journey which leads to total human development. It does so through respectful intervention in the lives of others and seeks to empower individuals and communities to develop as role models for the nation."

Servol's mission statement.

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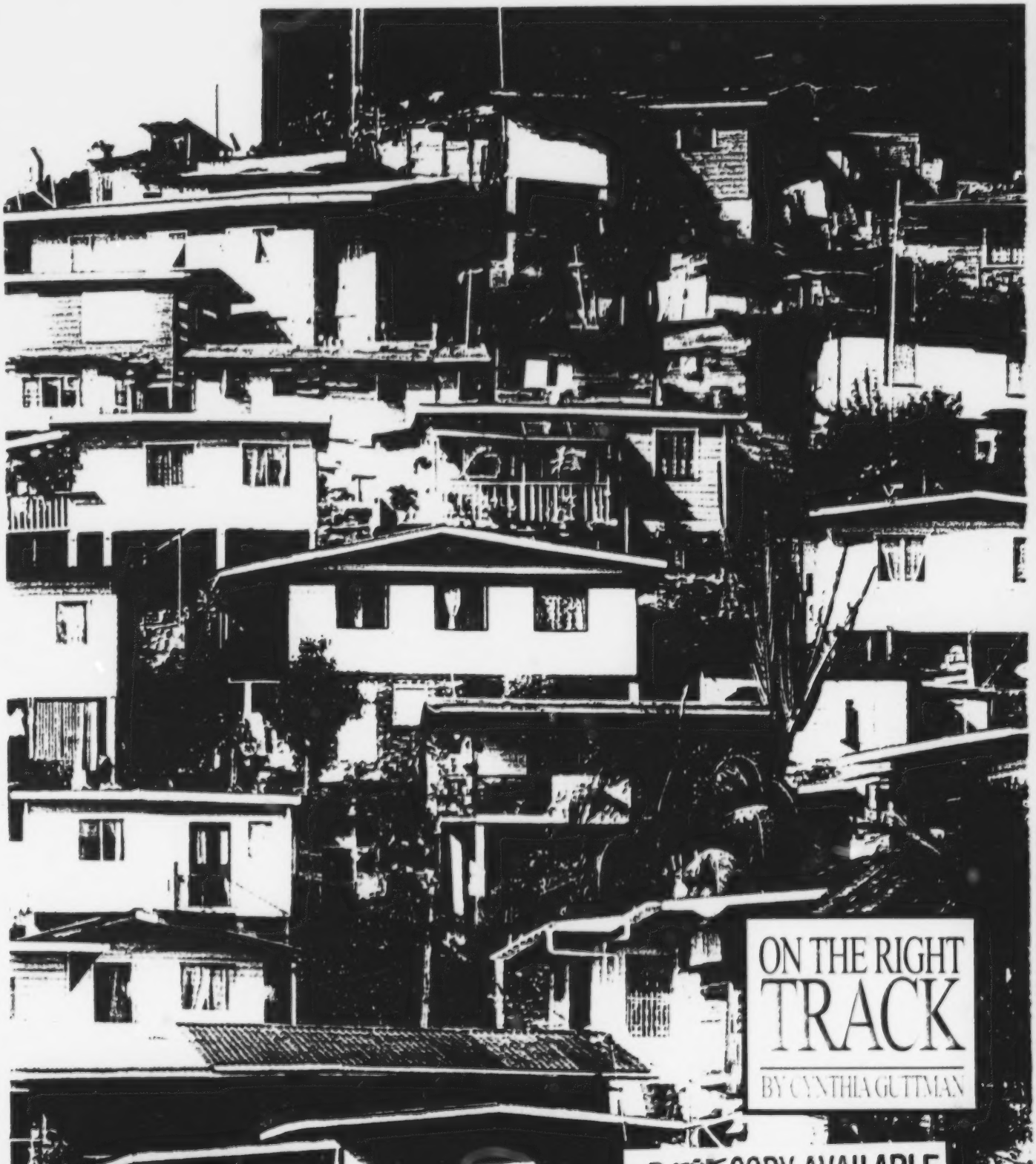
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TRACK
BY CYNTHIA GUTTMAN

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Introduction

Every year, the Poor Man's Christmas Dinner gathers the élite of Trinidad and Tobago in a prestigious hotel in Port of Spain. For US$100, guests are served a bowl of soup, a loaf of bread and a glass of water. But they are really there to hear speeches by young men and women from the

slums who have regained hope and power over their lives through a unique course in personal development and skills training.

The event is just one of the ways Servol which stands for Service Volunteered for All raises money for its programmes targeting children under 5, and teenagers between 16 and 19 who have done poorly at school. Since the organization was founded in 1970, the annual dinner has become its trademark and a platform for disadvantaged people to tell business leaders and politicians how they have managed to turn their lives around.

By listening to the marginalized and disadvantaged, Servol has defined its purpose, responded to needs and shared with other Caribbean islands its self-reliant approach to development. Programmes are community-based, stress parental involvement and encourage personal growth as a way of overcoming low self-esteem. Rough adolescents learn how to tune in to their emotions, teachers discover ways of nurturing children's creativity and parents are taught to be less authoritarian toward their offspring. The government recognized Servol's contribution in 1986 by asking it to extend its programmes throughout the country. Today, Servol reaches these groups through three programmes it has perfected over the past two decades:

*The Early Childhood Education Programme (ECEP), to develop the creativity and spontaneity of 2 to 5 year olds. Communities set up preschools, Servol trains teachers and the government subsidizes their minimal salaries. Families pay TT$20 (US$3,50), a monthly fee, except in rural areas where the programme is free.

*The Adolescent Development Programme (ADP), a fourteen-week course to help teenagers become more self-aware, understand their emotions and develop positive attitudes. They also take literacy classes and an intensive course in parenting. This programme runs in centres set up by the community and staffed by Servol-trained instructors. Students pay TT$50 (US$9) a month. Servol helps indigent trainees find weekend jobs to cover the fee.

*The next step is the Adolescent Skills Training Programme. After the ADP course, trainees learn a trade by working in one of Servol's regional training centres for six to eight months.

Servol oversees 153 pre-schools for some 5,000 2 to 5 year-old children and 40 adolescent training centres reaching 3,000 teenagers a year. It also trains pre-school teachers from eleven

Caribbean islands. In 1992, Servol participated in a national task force on education. For the first time, community-based education and early childhood programmes were recognized as part of the education system.

Because it has developed in response to grassroots demands, Servol cannot be cloned into another context. But its holistic approach to human growth and its highly-personalized methods inspire community workers, teachers and policy-planners tackling urban crime, drugs and violence. Lessons can be drawn from power-sharing in communities and the juggling of personalities, interests and wills. It is increasingly relevant where scarce resources and the shortcomings of the formal system are leading to new, albeit fragile, alliances between non-governmental organizations, government and the private sector. Servol's programmes are both remedial and preventive. Recognizing that the seeds of violence are sown early, Servol tries to equip teenagers with the tools of parenting and young children from disadvantaged areas with as many resources as possible to start off on the right track in school. Servol can also contribute much to the current International Year of the Family, because of the importance it gives to early childhood development and parenting, especially the involvement of fathers.

Local realities and demands are the starting blocks for all Servol's actions.

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Servol's beginnings:
a culture of ignorance

Servol had no grandiose beginnings, just two people and a political crisis. The year was 1970. In April, the government of Prime Minister Eric Williams, in power since 1956, declared a state of emergency after violent demonstrations by the "black power" movement against foreign influences in the economy and high unemployment among Trinidadians of African descent, who form 41 per cent of the population.

"How can we help you?" was the first question Father Gerard Pantin asked when he ventured into Laventille in 1970.

In the aftermath of the uprising and the soul-searching among Trinidadians, Gerard Pantin, a Roman Catholic priest and science teacher at one of the island's best schools, resigned and went into the slums that had been the main stage of the demonstrations. One of them, Laventille, was described by the poet Derek Walcott as "huddled there/steel tinkling its blue painted metal air, tempered in violence, like Rio's *favelas*, with snaking, perilous streets...This is the height of poverty for the desperate and black." After the uprising, the area had become associated with armed rebels and subversion.

Pantin and Wesley Hall, the West Indian fast bowler who went with him, met suspicion, cynicism, distrust and sometimes outright hostility by rival steelbands and gangs. But they continued to "lime", as shooting the breeze on street corners is known locally. "How can we help you?" they would ask. Slowly, the pair won respect. They found jobs for 300 people. They brought life back to a dilapidated community centre by replacing a broken beam (donated by a lumber yard) and finding chairs and benches requested for from the Community Development Division three years earlier. They arranged sewing, cooking and adult education, and play groups for toddlers. Each project required a financial contribution from the community. "Suddenly things began to happen. People waved, or smiled at us as we went by. We were stopped by people who wanted to talk," Pantin recalls. Servol soon opened an office in Laventille and volunteers came to coach football teams and teach various skills.

Servol quickly defined its principles. Anyone contacting the organization would be taught a "philosophy of ignorance", then "attentive listening" and finally "respectful intervention". This came from Pantin's belief that nearly everyone approached poverty with preconceived ideas and plans, all of them showing a cultural arrogance leading them to think poor people were too stupid to know or solve their own problems if given an opportunity. "We tried in every way possible to fashion Servol's work so that our engagement with people was on their terms, in response to their expressed problems and needs," he said.

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The national context

The problems confronting Servol in 1994 compared with 1970 are different in degree rather than in kind," says Pantin. "The deterioration in family life has worsened, joblessness and crime has increased, community spirit has been eroded by individualism and selfishness, and drugs have graduated from marijuana to cocaine."

If little of this is immediately evident to those who visit Trinidad for its dazzling carnival, the country's poor roads, slums and lack of sewage treatment soon make themselves felt. With a colonial plantation economy rich in oil, Trinidad and Tobago was spurred to rapid industrialization by the 1973 oil crisis. But this also meant real estate speculation, lavish spending on projects that often remained unfinished and a widening gap between rich and poor. The dramatic fall in the world oil prices in 1983 brought serious economic crisis. In 1991, the People's National Movement (PNM) was voted back into power on a platform of education and employment, defeating the incumbent National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR).

Unemployment is now at 24 per cent, with an estimated 47 per cent of the unemployed between 15-19 and 38 per cent between 20-24. Since the United States tightened up on direct trade routes from South America, the Eastern Caribbean has become a transshipment area for drugs from South to North America. Stories of violent crime by teenagers are in all the newspa-

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pers. The official literacy rate, once at 95 per cent, has fallen to 80 per cent, although Pantin says functional illiteracy among youth is as high as 40 per cent. The recent National Task Force on Education was commissioned to scrutinize the system. Was it failing more and more children? Primary education begins at 5 and lasts for seven years, and is attended by 88 per cent of the school-age population. Of those who complete the cycle, 70 per cent get three years of secondary education. To enter secondary school, students must pass a qualifying exam known as the "eleven plus". Ten thousand more students than there are secondary school places take this exam each year. About half will repeat the year, while the rest are put in school-leaving classes or simply drop out. So about 7,000 children between 12 and 17 may not be in school during the critical period of adolescence. It is these who are likely to turn towards Servol's adolescent and skills training programme, mainly in the hope of finding a job.

To deal with these young people, "we have developed our own expertise, our own technology," Pantin told an ADP graduation ceremony several years ago. "It is not a technology based on the flashing lights of computers and the rattle of micro-processors. It is a human technology which can be used to transform children and adolescents who have been battered psychologically and physically and give them a second chance in life."

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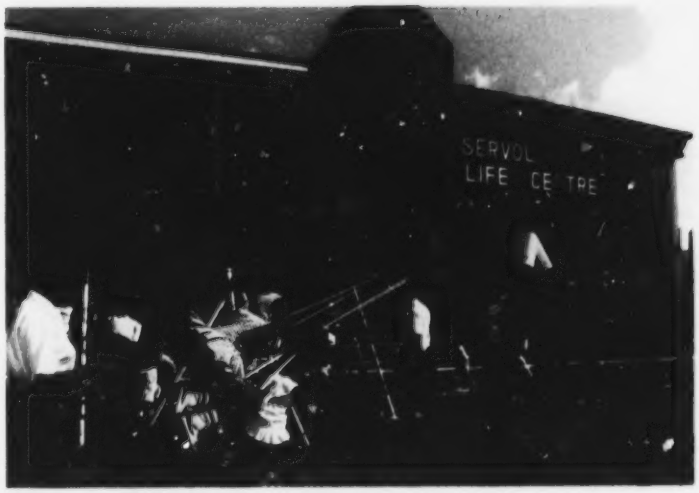
Servol's hub: the life centres

ife centres are the hub of Servol and put the idea of integrated education into action. At the Beetham Life Centre, built by Servol trainees in 1978, there are courses in carpentry and car mechanics, a health clinic, a nursery and personal development courses for adolescents. The Sunshine Hill centre teaches retarded and autistic children, but also has a pre-vocational unit and Servol's printery. The Forres Park centre has training workshops in ten trades, a dental clinic and a complex of family farms. The Caribbean Life Centre (CLC) trains pre-school instructors for Trinidad and Tobago, and the Caribbean in Servol's teaching methods and philosophy.

The life centre idea emerged gradually. Early on, responding to needs turned Servol into a community organization that reached out to the elderly, the handicapped, teenagers and toddlers. In St Barb's, a district of Laventille, a community centre opened in 1971 with a welding school, a health clinic, and basketball and cricket facilities. Similar projects cropped up in other areas, helped by twelve members of the Defense Force who were seconded indefinitely to Servol. When the National Housing Authority offered land on which to build a large centre, the first Servol life centre at Beetham was conceived.

When the centre opened, 200 boys and girls between 15 and 19 joined. Like most adolescents who pass through Servol, "the vast majority come from one-parent or no-parent families. Many carried knives for protection and marijuana cigarettes to help them in their moments of depression. They were rootless, disadvantaged, brutalized by their life experiences," writes Pantin in *The Servol Village*. "They came to the Servol vocational centre because there was no other place to go. We started working with them, training them in various skills and above all, listening to them. They told us everything: of their need for affection and acceptance, their hostility against the adult world, their suspicion of people, their terribly low opinion of themselves." The centre became a place where adolescents formed relationships: with instructors who often became parent substitutes; with babies and younger children because the teenagers have to spend time every day helping in the nursery; and with the sick and elderly, by visiting them. All this grew into the Adolescent Development Programme, a fourteen week course preceding vocational skills training. Through it, adolescents gain spiritual, physical, intellectual, cultural and emotional knowledge, summed up by the acronym SPICES.



Life centres: a place where adolescents form relationships and learn vocational skills.

A second chance at 17

"We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time."

(Extract from T.S. Eliot poem 'Little Gidding', quoted at the beginning of the spirituality course)

very adolescent who wants to join Servol is interviewed with a parent or guardian. Few are turned away, although some may have to wait for three to six months for admission. Students are made to feel they are becoming part of a special community. "You can imagine your entry into Servol like getting into a ship. You will learn things like carpentry, nursing, welding, child-care etc. which will help you to get a job," explains the preface of *A Second Chance at 17* introducing Servol's orientation programme. "These are like the sails of the ship, they help you to move swiftly through the waters of life. This course is like the rudder which steers the ship. No matter how fast a ship goes, if it cannot steer itself properly, it will crash into rock: e.g.: a good carpenter may have a bad temper."

During ADP, teenagers explore their insecurities, complexes and prejudices in a warm, family-like atmosphere. They are taught how to handle anger, boredom and loneliness. They discuss different kinds of love, from love of family and friendship to the meaning and responsibility of sexual love. Many emotional problems that surface are dealt with by group therapy and peer counselling (see box). "We try through this programme to help our young people to understand who they are and to recognize and cope with the many feelings they experience, especially in this whole area of dealing with anger and the cycle of violence," said Sister Ruth Montrichard, then Servol's deputy executive director, at a gradua-

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Students are prepared for the competitive work world

tion ceremony. Adolescents journey back in time to study a child's development from the womb to early childhood. They learn how lack of proper food, emotional traumas and alcohol and drug abuse by the mother can cause serious physical and psychological damage to the child. Relationships, values, violence and different kinds of love are further discussed in a spirituality course, in which stories from the Bible are made relevant to adolescent lives. The course incorporates basic elements from the spirituality of Hinduism and Islam, Trinidad's two other main religions.

In another part of ADP, adolescents focus on parenting, since most first pregnancies occur between 17 and 20. Young trainees spend at least three hours a week learning how to wash, feed, dress and play with babies under staff supervision. They learn about the child development from conception to the age of 5. An illustrated book shows helpful and harmful parenting behaviour. Attention is given to the male image in the home and the father's role in bringing up children. "There is a terrible problem with fathers here," explains one Servol trainer. "Few know anything about good parenting and most had a tough childhood where violence and beatings were the only way of communicating and enforcing discipline. I believe we have a better kind of male coming out of ADP, more sensitive, more open, less aggressive and more knowledgeable about what it means to have kids."

"ADP is like a treatment. They come here scarred and wounded, and they leave with much more discipline and self-awareness," said Lorna Brown, co-ordinator of the El Socorro Regional Life Centre located about 10 km outside Port of Spain. A typical day in ADP begins at 7:30 a.m., when students punch a time clock. The flag is raised, the national anthem sung and a brief prayer said. Students organize this assembly which instils a sense of discipline and responsibility, essential for graduating to the world of work. "You really feel the emotion there and the commitment of the staff," said Keith Oberg of the Inter-American Foundation, who recently sat in on the first days of an ADP programme.

After this course, adolescents can join a skills training programme, where they learn a marketable skill and follow literacy classes. All adolescents are tested for literacy and offered appropriate remedial classes from six to twelve hours a week. About a third of Servol's ADP trainees follow the literacy programme which is based on knowledge of the skill they will learn and facts about their country and the world. So, the first words learnt are those used in the corresponding skill. According to one life centre coordinator, "the most difficult problem is to get these kids to admit that they can't read and write enough to get on in society."

Production is the key to the skills pro-

gramme: 60 per cent of Servol's income comes from its own productive activity. Jobs are done on contract for customers, firms and institutions. The catering department produces 1,300 meals a day, the carpenters make furniture, including for the pre-school centres. With masons, plumbers and electricians, they build houses and do maintenance jobs. Servol's print shop trains apprentices by producing the organization's in-house material (including a regular newsletter) and winning outside contracts. Nursing students are assigned to nurseries and clinics. There is a different kind of interaction during this part of the course: trade instructors call it "tough love" and take a no-nonsense attitude to prepare trainees for the competitive work world.

The money earned helps pay staff salaries, maintain equipment and give cash incentives to trainees who have worked hard on particular jobs. Students help draw up orders and cost and stock sheets. Once they can work unsupervised and show they can accept responsibility and be punctual, they are apprenticed to firms for on-the-job training. Employers and students, as well as parents, sign contracts accepting the job-training arrangement. All money earned by trainees goes first to Servol. Two-thirds is passed on to the trainees, who come to the vocational

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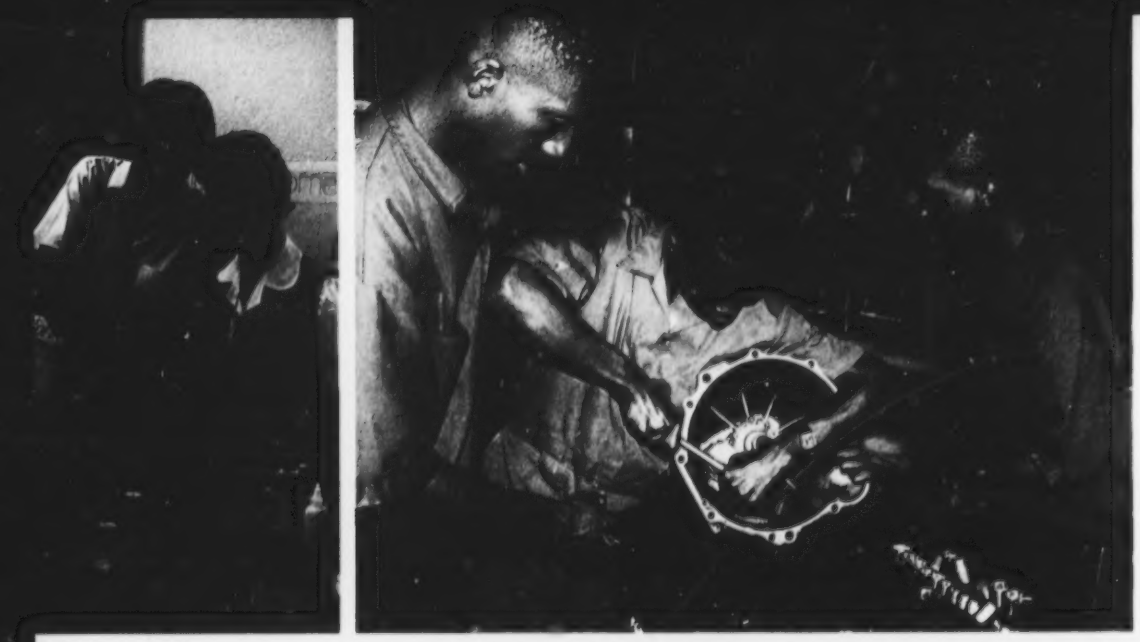

Some 60 per cent of Servol's income comes from its own productive activity (far left). Young women learn how to manage the classroom, giving children the chance to express their creativity.

training centre every two weeks with evaluations from their employers. A job-training officer visits the trainees at work and monitors their performance. Many trainees obtain a full-time job before this period is over. At the end of the programme, they pass national exams leading to a national trade achievement certificate.

Of the 3,000 students who go through ADP and training every year, 10 per cent return to finish secondary school, many through evening classes. Some 75 per cent find work, often through a job placement office situated at the Beetham centre. Pantin says job offers have fallen off due to the recession, but Servol graduates are twice as likely to get jobs as trainees from other government or private training programmes. Servol's drop-out rate is 5 per cent, compared with 40 per cent for the Youth Training Employment Partnership Programme, launched by the government in 1988. Evaluations confirm that the Servol graduate is well looked upon by employers. According to one, Servol's programme, besides providing vocational skills, has "furnished its students with attitudes toward work, timekeeping, discipline and relationships which make them superior to the average worker in the country without such training."

Students report a great improvement in how they feel about themselves. "The most important thing you learn has to do with attitudes, to control anger," said Sheldon Sookhram, 18, who is training as an automechanic at the Morvant Regional Centre. "When I finish, I want to continue with evening courses in English and maths because I didn't pass those exams in school." Ron Weber, a consultant for the Inter-American Foundation, recalls that "these students, judged failures in the formal system, were as bright as any kids I've ever met. Some of them were writing poetry. They had all kinds of interests and were quite wise about life." Evaluations also praise Servol graduates for their community spirit. Many young people have joined forces to start netball and football teams, and through community action have raised funds to build playing fields and other facilities. They often inspire adults by getting involved in activities like homes for senior citizens, pre-schools or child-care centres. In several areas plagued by drugs, crime, broken homes and a lack of basic facilities, one evaluation reports that "the young people are the ones who have initiated not just a change, but the beginning of a community spirit."

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Instructors: trained to listen

We are Servol, and we care," says a charter written by the staff of the Beetham centre in 1981. It takes no special qualification to become a Servol instructor, but a great ability to listen and care. Three times a year, an in-house evaluation with the current group of trainees tries to find out how they feel about their instructors. The young people unanimously say that what distinguishes Servol instructors from most teachers they have come across is that "they really care for us".

Instructors know how to help teenagers express their feelings.

Servol's three-month training programme starts with attentive listening: "In Servol, teachers are trained to care by being put into contact with the trainees from day one," says Sister Montrichard. For three weeks, trainees sit in silently on ADP classes, observing how the SPICES curriculum is used. They see how teenagers learn to express feelings, watch their anger and pain surface, but are not allowed to intervene. Each session is followed by a teacher-training discussion. Next, trainees gain deeper understanding of development psychology, and the needs and concerns of adolescents. They develop communication, teaching and counselling skills. As well as learning how to manage a life centre and making ADP a community-based programme, they are immersed in Servol philosophies and how to guide teenagers through the SPICES curriculum. At the end, each instructor takes the floor in a classroom, guided by an experienced teacher. A Servol instructor earns TT$1,400 (US$241) a month. Recent budget cuts included a suspended Pension Plan and a sharply reduced Medical Plan. "Working under the pall of these very real concerns, in the demanding sphere of youth and community development, can take its toll on even the most dedicated instructor," said Gerard D'Abreau, assistant ADP coordinator. "A few have had to be audienced/counselled for what, on the surface, would appear to be less than enthusiastic job performance, but what, in reality, was really inept coping with stress."

Trade instructors are hired full time by Servol and follow short training workshops introducing them to the organization's philosophy. These include understanding adolescents, communication, motivation, discipline, and record-keeping. Several instructors are Servol graduates who have returned to the organization after experience in the workplace. "After five years, I came back to Servol because I recognized the need for training and getting involved with people who are underprivileged, and that I should be an example, or booster, so students can see they can make it to the top," said one instructor. "It all depends on their ability to work." Field officers are chosen among ADP instructors and are selected for their effectiveness as instructors and their ability to assess their colleagues. They are expected to give incisive weekly progress reports and meet every two weeks with centre co-ordinators. Field officers attend sessions one day a month often given by guest lecturers. During the year, staff participate in training seminars on a theme chosen by Servol. Because of concern over rising violence in society, seminars in 1991-1992 dealt with parenting. ADP instructors were challenged to help adolescents develop attitudes and skills so as to become better parents.

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Fund Aid: encouraging entrepreneurs

Derek Gilbert graduated after eighteen months from Servol's Beetham centre where he specialized in woodwork. With a $2,000 (U.S.) loan from Fund Aid, he set up his own woodwork shop at his parents' home, with one helper. Today, he has not only repaid his loan on time, but has five full-time workers and is about to train fifteen unemployed youths.

Fund Aid is Servol's credit arm, set up in 1973 for communities and individuals who do not have enough to borrow from commercial banks. Loans are granted for activities such as tailoring, catering, hairdressing, auto-mechanics and farming. "Our philosophy is based on the promotion of self-help among the less privileged sectors of the community by providing long term and/or low cost loans or by guaranteeing loans to applicants from such sectors of the community," explains Fund Aid's chief credit and field officer. "The ideas and projects must originate from the people themselves and our job is to assist them make a reality of these ideas and projects." In April 1991, Fund Aid got a US$500,000 loan and a US$115,000 technical co-operation grant from the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) to expand operations.

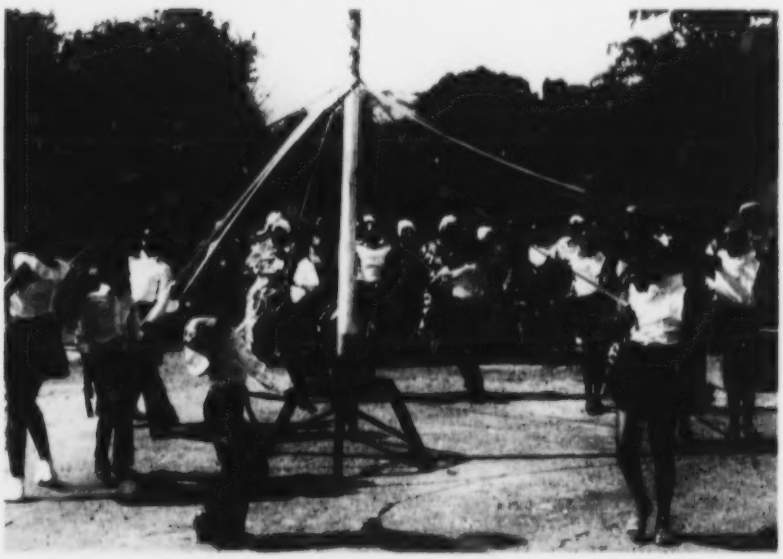
The average loan is US$1,100, to be paid back over two years. The arrears rate or late payment is 19.75 per cent, which loan officers aim to reduce to 10 per cent, partly through hiring more field staff this year. Fund Aid has been able to meet only 7 per cent of the demand for loans. So far, there have been 821 direct beneficiaries, affecting the lives of 4,100 people. A recent evaluation showed 59 per cent of beneficiaries were female and from very low income groups. Beneficiaries are trained in small business management, record keeping, financial monitoring and marketing. The IADB technical co-operation grant has enabled Fund Aid to expand this side of its operation and install computer facilities.

"The ideas and projects must originate from the people themselves and our job is to assist them make a reality of these ideas."

Applying for a loan involves meetings with field officers who put the potential client's case before a subcommittee of Fund Aid's board of trustees. The applicant must have at least five employed individuals as guarantors, in effect giving the community final approval of the enterprise.

First steps: a child-centred, community-based approach

t the other end of the educational spectrum are children under 5. About 60 per cent are enrolled in pre-schools in Trinidad and Tobago. Early on in its work in slums, Servol found one way to overcome suspicion and hostility was to start a nursery school. Today, all the country's 153 public pre-schools are run by the Servol/Ministry of Education programme. They are sometimes in churches, under someone's house or in a community centre. They are the fruit of a community's choice. "In December 1986, after the general election, the newly-elected government asked Servol to help set up early childhood centres and centres for training adolescents all over the country" said Sister Montrichard. "We were happy to say 'yes' but on one condition and that was that each early childhood or adolescent centre would have to be run by the communities in question. Communities would have to ask for these projects and maintain buildings for them, organize themselves into boards of education to supervise the projects, choose teachers for training, collect school fees and volunteer time to help with the project." This has happened. When several people in a community are interested in starting a pre-school, they approach Servol and then form an eight-person school board. This provides and maintains the facilities, monitors teacher performance, pays the part of their salaries not covered by the small government subsidy and collects fees. Servol provides training to teachers from the fifty pre-schools that formerly came under the Ministry of Education.



Servol advocates an early childhood education that is parent-oriented, high quality and community-based. This is because Servol's experience suggests that:

1) Nearly all a child's personality development takes place before the age of 3, and by the time children reach the age of 5, they are less receptive to change.

2) Parents and community members are likely to have a far stronger influence on small children than teachers or other secondary care-givers, making relationships with parents essential to the success of early childcare programmes.

3) The world children have to face is tough and competitive. To survive, children must have a well-developed personality and healthy self-esteem.

As in the adolescent programme, the

SPICES curriculum requires the teacher to help children develop physically, intellectually, creatively, emotionally and spiritually. Rather than pressure young children into reading, writing and counting at the earliest age, the syllabus aims to help toddlers develop a positive self-image, to be resourceful and curious about learning, and to be responsible and caring towards the world around them.

Each chapter in the SPICES teacher's guide presents targets such as: "The child is able to share experiences with others", and "The child is able to express ideas/feelings through an art creation." Art, drama, music and dance are encouraged through making mobiles or puppets, exploring sounds and acting out family roles. The curriculum is geared to learning about the Caribbean heritage: children make masks, costumes and pan instruments for carnival and colour flags on Independence Day. Reflecting the region's rich ethnic heritage, they celebrate Christian, Hindu and Muslim feasts. Intellectual activities involve concepts of time, space, language, colours and pre-writing skills.

The programme emphasizes self-expression, participation and creativity, and requires teachers to become very involved with a class. According to one evaluation, "the pre-schools themselves are a joy to be in. The pre-school teachers are all trained in classroom management so they are not averse to children moving about and becoming involved in many activities." Several evaluations praise the curriculum, noting that students entering primary schools from Servol tend to be more sociable, speak up in class and generally communicate more than traditional pre-school children do. Traditionally, children mostly learn reading, writing and arithmetic, and are expected to sit at their desks or tables except during break periods. Although some primary school teachers have visited Servol pre-schools and adopted some of their teaching methods, there is "a danger over the long-term for children to forget what learning is about," said Ron Weber, referring to the transition into the formal system.

Since 1988, Servol's pre-school teacher training programme has been able to issue certificates recognized by Oxford University, which acts as Servol's external assessor.

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Christine Parker, a member of the Oxford Delegacy of Local Examinations, has been visiting the early childhood programme for the past five years. "I found the programme extremely impressive. It is striking to see how strong and confident the children are," she said. She has also been trying to make children's books more available and has encouraged teachers to write stories for their pupils.

Recognizing the role of parents as the primary care-giver, each trainee is responsible for setting up a parent-education programme. "Rap sessions" are held at which teachers try to persuade parents that excessive discipline and neglect of small children crushes natural creativity and potential. They speak to parents about hygiene, nutrition, environmental issues and the child's emotional development. In most pre-schools, teachers noted improved cleanliness, punctuality and attendance of children over the year, while parents seemed to express more love, praise and encouragement for their offspring. "Teenage parents, both fathers and mothers, are showing significant changes in their role as parents," says one report. "They are more responsible and they both take an active part in caring and looking after their children." In some areas, the district health nurse was invited to speak to a parenting class. It was not in vain: in all but one of the 105 nursery schools surveyed in 1992, junk food, candy and soft drinks had disappeared from children's lunch boxes and been replaced by fruit, vegetables and other healthy foods. Parents often help with school outings, sports days, field trips and concerts. They supervise the pre-schools and even stand in when teachers have Servol workshops and seminars. In several cases, teachers reported that adults who never spoke to each other were friends through their involvement in pre-schools.

This parenting programme again highlights the links between early childhood and adolescence: teenage parents are the most willing to attend parent education courses and those who get most out of them. According to a 1990 evaluation, they seem more open than older parents to new ideas and ways of rearing children advocated by trainee teachers.

Community involvement in schools often takes the form of clean-up around the school, spraying for mosquitoes, and helping in building, repairing or maintaining the pre-school building, as well as fund-raising and supporting school celebrations through prize-giving, food donations and attendance.

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Teachers:

a three-year training course

Since 1983, Servol has run a three-year pre-school teacher-training course, with one year's full-time study at the Servol Caribbean Teacher Training Centre in Port of Spain and two years internship. This centre helps the Eastern Caribbean region develop training programmes in early childhood and adolescent development. Servol trains about sixty pre-school teachers a year from other Caribbean countries and so far some 300 have graduated from the course. In 1992, a three-day symposium gathered co-ordinators of early childhood education programmes in the Caribbean to exchange ideas, participate in workshops and discuss achievements.

Each community chooses who it wants trained as pre-school teachers and usually picks young women between 20 and 30, active in the church, mosque or temple, with at least three years' secondary education. "More important than a piece of paper showing which exams you have taken is how you are as a person," explains Pantin. Candidates chosen for the Servol teacher-training school will be supported by the district board of education, which pays for the year-long course.

Personal development and self-awareness are stressed during the course. An orientation period was added to the first month when an evaluation by the early childhood programme teachers pointed out that many trainees had a negative self-image and felt homesick. The programme now starts by helping them develop a sense of community and come to terms with themselves. "The students come from such a formal education system that they find it hard to adapt," said Parker.

The programme includes learning how to work with parents and the community. "This is the excellent part of it," said Parker. Trainees have to report on what they have done in this respect. Some trainees for instance, arranged dental check-ups for children. During the two-year internship, trainees attend monthly workshops which deal with classroom management, how to improve curriculum materials and community awareness. Parents can also attend and have said how they appreciated the chance to interact with teachers and the parents of other students.

Salaries are small — TT$500 (US-$87) a month, about a quarter of what government teachers earn — yet the teachers' dedication is striking. "Working for Servol is almost like being a volunteer," said one teacher, "but I get such satisfaction from this job that I want to hang on to it."

Field officers are the key to the programme's success. "I was very impressed by their knowledge," said Parker. Field officers visit interns in the field, encouraging them and monitoring their performance.They also go to training sessions with them every other week and organize workshops attended by all the teachers in a zone. Subjects vary according to needs. All field officers have been pre-school teachers. They make monthly reports to the Caribbean life centre and can often play a crucial role in dealing with community boards of education. Problems include internal dissension, inability to provide a site for a pre-school or failure to raise funds to top up the low teacher salaries.

For teachers from government pre-schools, Servol provides an in-service training with twice-weekly workshops and six-week vacation workshops, followed by regular supervision. At the outset of the Servol/Ministry of Education relationship, the obligation to do this provoked some reticence from teachers, according to a member of the Bernard van Leer Foundation, one of Servol's earliest funders. Government school teachers are generally chosen by the ministry of education on the basis of their academic achievements, and training for pre-school and secondary school teachers is not compulsory.

"More important than a piece of paper showing which exams you have taken is how you are as a person."

Government collaboration: finding a modus vivendi

"We no longer have to lobby for a reasonable budget".

In February 1992, the Trinidadian press ran articles on the effects of the government's 40 per cent cut in Servol's subsidy. Since the TT$1.7 million (US$293,000) subsidy helped pay teachers' salaries, the cut meant thirty-three pre-schools would be shut down within a month. A doctor warned that "it is going to cost this country far more than the 40 per cent the government is withholding from Servol to support those young people who will now be left without hope." Diana Mahabir, an independent senator, called the cut a "tragedy", reminding readers that children at Servol schools were getting some of the best pre-school education in the country at next to no cost. Similarly, the cut in ADP was likely to "seal the fate of hundreds of young people who have nowhere else to go". The protests reflected the enormous credibility Servol had gained.

The government subsidy was finally restored by 20 per cent. At present, it stands at TT$2.1 million (US$350,000), which pays for 153 early childhood care and education centres. Pantin says the programme survives only because Servol has continued to train teachers at no cost to the government. He put the real cost of the programme at TT$2.5 million.

How successful has Servol's relationship with the government been? "The government's attitude is ambivalent," said Diana Mahabir, but Servol has "handled the partnership problem with quite a lot of sophistication". The relationship is helped by a shift in the government's approach to the grassroots: on the recommendation of a top-level task force on social and economic development, it recently adopted a community-based development model in which the expertise of non-governmental organizations (NGO) in "safety-net" programmes is recognized. Mahabir stresses that although NGOs have always played a vital role in providing social services in Trinidad, it now seems "the government is ready to support this rather than fight it, which may be due to Servol and the fact they have been so successful".

Huub Schreurs of the Bernard van Leer foundation, feels a balance has yet to be struck between the two parties. "Bureaucrats tend to take over and forget about content and the ability you need in the field", he says. Servol's challenge in the years to come is to reinforce community capacity and "be able to keep a firm grip on it".

Since the Ministry of Education/Servol ADP programme began five years ago, it has grown from four life centres to forty-three, and from 12 employees to 130. Teacher training has been perfected, but the government has not taken responsibility for the in-service training model, Schreurs says. The combination of a flexible NGO style and a more rigid, bureaucratic one makes a fragile alliance, but that it exists at all is thanks to Pantin's top education ministry connections under the previous NAR government. Servol survived a return to the PNM, however. "They have made the transition to the opposition party because of a good political sense and the national attraction of the programme," says Keith Oberg of the Inter-American Foundation. Pantin explains: "When Servol was approached by the government to spread its programmes, we insisted that while we were prepared to access funding from overseas foundations, the government had to commit itself to counterpart funding and gradually increase its contribution as external financing was phased out." Today, Pantin feels the "only frustration we have is from middle-level civil servants, not too happy with the major role given to an NGO". But, he says, "this has practically disappeared and we no longer have to lobby for a reasonable budget".

Funding: the road toward self-sufficiency

Servol runs programmes employing 400 people with an annual budget of some TT$9 million. Half of this sum comes from the Ministry of Education for the salaries of those employed in the early childhood and adolescent programmes; one quarter comes from overseas foundations and the rest is provided by the productive work of the life centres (construction, training, maintenance and printing), pledges from local business, donations and the annual Christmas dinner. The accounts of Servol Ltd. and those of the ministry of education/Servol programmes are separate.

As well as donations under deed of covenant, the private sector has put up TT$3.5 million (US$603,448) and has also started an endowment fund to provide financial help after the withdrawal of funding by the van Leer Foundation at the end of 1993. Companies supporting Servol include the National Petroleum Co., the Natural Gas Co., Neal and Massy, leading insurance companies, the three biggest banks, Angostura Ltd and a number of other companies.

The Van Leer Foundation, the Inter-American Foundation, MISEREOR and HELVETAS have been Servol's most loyal donors. While the Van Leer Foundation has worked closely with Servol in developing the early childhood care programme, the Inter-American Foundation has given Servol grants to the regional programme and to run Fund Aid. It has made a US$264,370 five-year grant to train instructors in ECEP and ADP. A smaller three-year grant is for the Parent Outreach Programme in which field officers go into homes, help groups of parents set up small income-generating projects and show them how to stimulate their children's' development. MISEREOR and HELVETAS have given support to the adolescent programme.

Servol has stayed locally-based: "People are more prepared to contribute financially to their own area and to the welfare of their own children than to a centrally-managed project," says Pantin in a Servol newsletter. "Proper systems must however be put in place to ensure accountability." The executive director or chairman of the board attends the fortnightly meetings of co-ordinators and field officers. "The information we receive is a crucial link to the community," said Pantin. "One of us also visits every centre at least once a year to link up with the community and we invite boards to come to our general headquarters to discuss the progress of the centres".

Pantin insists that going to scale has not compromised Servol's independent NGO status. "If all government funding were withdrawn", he says, "the 153 pre-schools and about 30 of the 40 life centres would have to go private or close down. Servol would continue training teachers and instructors from all over the Caribbean and would administer about ten life centres (the large regional ones offering vocational skills training) which could support themselves. In 1994, Servol's budget from the Ministry of Education was US$350,000 for 4,800 pre-school children; and US$614,000 for 3,000 adolescents. The grants received by Servol, which have now ended were for renovating buildings, for buying furniture and vocational equipment, and for other capital items.

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Despite staff dedication, low salaries contribute to teacher turnover.

Despite staff dedication, low salaries contribute to high teacher turnover. One field co-ordinator, asked if he planned to stay with Servol, said: "I'm not sure. The salaries are too low, it's hard on my family." He earns TT$1,600 (US$275) a month, compared with TT$4,800 (US$827) earned by a supervisor in the formal system. Often however, poor wages seem "offset by the obvious pride and satisfaction of being part of something that works," said Oberg. Lorna Brown, co-ordinator of the El Socorro life centre, was a teacher in the formal system before joining Servol. "I came here because I was frustrated with my job," she said. "I wanted to do so much but there was nothing I could change. When you see the results of the kids in formal school, it's sad, they're like machines or like computers." Good promotion chances are also a Servol attraction. More than 80 per cent of the senior positions have been filled from within Servol.

Power-sharing in the communities

The sharing of power at community level does not always happen smoothly: the delicate balance of power and continual education of the boards absorbs project co-ordinators and field officers. Sometimes boards are too complacent and leave instructors with the bulk of responsibility.

"Getting together with a truly representative community board of education was not without a few anxious moments," explained two instructors from the Morvant-Laventille life centre. "These relations evolved amid skepticism, mainly due to intra-community and political overtones with two board officials involved in the last local government election campaign. The relationship between the board of education and the community, while not as co-operative and dynamic as one would wish, is still one of healthy respect and understanding."

New boards of education have common problems but are gaining strength and are fighting for their communities. "Boards were quick to gather up all resources to support the national management efforts to get the government to reverse its 40 per cent budget cut," said Gerard D'Abreau, ADP's national co-ordinator. "This support once again showed how boards, parents and communities really felt about the centres. The centres were now truly their life centres and must stay." He added: "Boards have continued to render a sensitive and supportive presence in the lives of their centres and are more and more drawing their communities (business, professional and otherwise) into the life centre experience."

Replicability: starting on home ground

If there is anything replicable in the Servol experience, it is the approach and the methodology. Listening, consulting with the community, having patience to wait and proceed at the pace of the people, these are the skills necessary for community workers wherever in the world they work," writes Pantin in *The Servol Village*.

Servol's expertise in early childcare and adolescence led to an arrangement with government to go to scale. Servol methods are spreading to other Eastern Caribbean islands. In 1993, Servol seemed to have reached a new peak prompting Pantin to call it an *annus mirabilis*. The section of the National Task Force on Early Childhood Care and Education recommended a focus "on the family, the child and ultimately the community". At the secondary level, the report called for less impersonal schools and a curriculum that includes technology studies and is closer to the needs of learners "experiencing psychological conflicts".

The same year, after teenage crimes in a Port of Spain school, Servol and the guidance unit of the ministry of education drafted a plan to deal with violence in schools. "It was a historic event, signalling the official entry of Servol into the formal education system," says Pantin. Two Servol instructors were appointed to help students develop self-awareness, with emphasis on spirituality and parenting. Students soon opened up to Servol instructors, while teachers, at first wary of the newcomers, began to sit in on some sessions. "The instructors confirmed that there was absolutely nothing wrong with the pupils, who were in no way different from the 3,000 adolescents with whom Servol deals each year," says the report on the experiment. The problem lay in a cultural gap between street-smart pupils from the grassroots and university-trained, middle-class teachers. "Nothing in their training had equipped them to understand, much less deal with the problems of these youngsters. In addition, very few of them came from the area, and were not particularly interested in the school as part of the community. The result was that an atmosphere of fear enveloped the entire educational plan."

ADP has also been introduced to a juvenile detention centre, adapted to an orphanage, and used to help recovering drug addicts. The SPICES curriculum was the basis of the adapted programmes. Servol works closely with government in drug prevention and has helped the government train teachers for its youth training and employment programme. Although the guidance unit of the Ministry of Education strongly advocates incorporation of ADP into secondary schools, Senator Mahabir feels Servol will have no effect on altering the formal education system, and specifically in the weeding out imposed by the "eleven-plus" exam.

Servol's programmes have attracted interest from schools coping with violence

Conclusion: a more responsive society

Reflecting his background as a science teacher, Gerry Pantin once described Servol as a mole cricket: "It is a graceless, awkward-looking insect when it emerges from its subterranean habitat, and is generally regarded as a pest. It spends most of its time below the soil, nibbling at the roots of savannah grass, never destroying it and never interfering with it drastically — but making its distinctive presence felt nevertheless."

The metaphor of something alive and inquisitive is appropriate. But Pantin's observations during his first weeks in Laventille are worth recalling: struck by the lack of a stable family life, he said "the child grows up without the ability to love. The consequence is a vicious circle from which few children emerge able to take their place in the world as balanced, responsible adults." Servol works on all fronts to rebuild families and give the disadvantaged self-esteem and hope for the future. It does so through its own blend of "tough love" that combines listening with caring, creating role models and building up community partnerships. "Servol sees itself as a kind of village and it certainly functions that way," said Ron Weber of the Inter-American Foundation, pointing out that it brings together people from communities all over Trinidad. In a region where patronage is deeply entrenched, Weber praises Servol's method of instilling a symbolic and material dimension to community development: "If beneficiaries do not contribute something real, it is unlikely they will take credit for what happens. Development is not just a question of economic and material progress but also of the satisfaction of being empowered and in control in one's own community."

Giving rough adolescents the responsibility of caring for a toddler is likely to have a lasting influence on them. Instilling a love of learning at an early age and emphasizing the role of parents gives disadvantaged children a better chance of starting off right. A course challenging teenagers to understand their emotions and build relationships can start to heal their sense of failure and low self-esteem.

Servol has a well-defined philosophy and two main target groups that have guided its policies and staff over the last two decades. Some 20,000 adolescents have gone through ADP, a large number on an island of 1.2 million people. The early childhood care and education centres have started to shape the attitudes of very many

"Is not just a question of economic and material progress but also of the satisfaction of being empowered and in control in one's own community."

young children. In going to scale, it has kept in touch with these groups by a decentralized system while maintaining high standards. The organization's skill in dealing with young children and adolescents has been recognized by the government, which asked it to extend its programmes and, more recently, to head the National Task Force's subcommittee on early childhood education. Pre-school teachers are assessed by an outside examiner from Oxford University and teenagers must pass a national exam to get a certificate in their trade. Both of these enhance Servol's status and credibility.

More than 100 communities have taken responsibility for the education of 2 to 5 year olds. Trinidad is going through a difficult economic period, partly because of structural adjustment programmes and falling oil revenues, putting more pressure on communities to organise and promote self-help. Not all communities can afford to build pre-schools and the most disadvantaged are not always being reached, so Servol recently developed the Parent Outreach Programme. In an attempt to keep the vocational skills programme abreast of change, the organization asked the Inter-American Development Bank for funds for computer literacy and electronic training programmes for 1,700 adolescents a year.

Servol's experience also shows that grassroots people can be trained as fine instructors in a human development programme and that competent childhood educators can often be people with few academic credentials. Servol has developed expertise mainly by listening to needs and helping people gain power over their lives.

Then there is the inspiring figure of Servol's founder, Gerard Pantin. "Gerry Pantin is a man with a vision and great charisma. He has the ability to infect people with this vision," according to Ruth Cohen of the van Leer Foundation. "It is amazing to see how inspired the staff are. Teachers feel very inspired to do something for children, their parents, their community and country."

In the end, vision is perhaps the best word, a few months after Gerard Pantin retired and was replaced by Sister Montrichard, who has been with the organization since 1975. Servol continues to travel towards a vision: of greater self-knowledge and reliance on the part of instructors, parents, teenagers and children, of a holistic education that challenges students in heart and mind. It strives for a more humane, responsive system, in which education starts at birth, ripens in the home, and is supported by the community. As an African saying cherished by Servol goes, "It takes a village to bring up a child."

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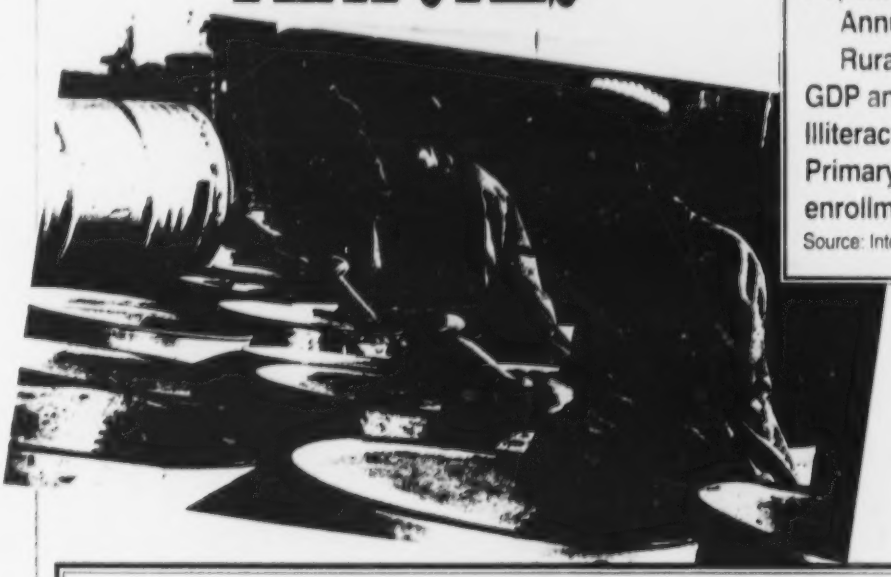


TRINIDAD TOBAGO

facts and figures

Area :	5.128 sq. km
Population :	1.265.000
Annual growth :	1.3 %
Rural :	32.6 %
GDP annual growth :	-1 %
Illiteracy :	3.9 %
Primary school enrollment :	97.0 %

Source: Inter-American Development Bank, 1992

ADP: how peer counselling works

We begin by having all trainees and instructors sit on the floor in a circle and create a mood by singing songs expressing deep feelings. Then we ask each trainee to write on an unsigned slip of paper their deepest hurt and their deepest pain. The slips are then put in a bag and drawn out one at a time.

The special case of Mary

We bend backwards to ensure the confidentiality of each statement, but the trainees seem to want them aired and discussed. When Mary's (not her real name) slip was opened, it read: "I have been sexually abused by my stepfather since I was 12 and it's still going on. Please help me."

The group immediately realized from her reaction that it was Mary's slip and she ran over to the instructors to be hugged. Then the group took over the session and began to give her advice: "Say NO to the man. Tell your mother. Go to the police. Talk about it to us".

Mary accepted all this, yet before the session, she was withdrawn, aggressive and stubborn. She listened closely to everything, looking deeply into the face of each speaker, her own eyes big and open, almost greedily lapping up the attention she was receiving while gentle tears flowed down her cheeks. She was not alone any more and possibly there was a way out. At the end of the session, we joined hands, sang more healing songs and hugged and kissed each other.

Making it work
FEATURES

Violent parents, violent children

This is an extract from a position paper delivered at the Regional Seminar for Adolescent Programme Co-ordinators by Fr Gerard Pantin, 30 November, 1993. It gives a clear outline of Servol's philosophy.

The lonely adolescent

One of the best kept secrets in our Caribbean society is that by the time a young man makes the crucial decision to pick up a gun or a knife to do violence to another human being, an incredible amount of violence has been visited on him by unenlightened or uncaring nurturing practices. Everyone is very much concerned about the alarming upsurge in violent crime perpetrated by adolescents on society but no one appears to be interested in the root causes of such behaviour. So let me throw out a few provocative thoughts which, I hope, will stimulate discussion over the next three days. Over the last twenty years, I have talked to hundreds of adolescents and older people, and in most instances I hear the same story:

I go from day to day, hoping that something will happen to make me come alive

I am lonely, so empty I need another

My life is just the same thing over and over again

There is no magic, no ecstasy in my life

I am constantly looking for another, someone to love and someone to love me and, I mean really love me in the way I need to be loved but there is no one

I seem to end up looking for love in all the wrong places

No one pays attention to me, no one respects me, no one really considers me important

If I were to die, no one would miss me

I have thought of drugs, even suicide but I have seen others go that way and I do not feel that is the answer

When you have a gun in your hand people really respect you but so many who have tried that end up dead

So I go from day to day, hoping that something will happen to make me come alive but I keep on asking myself: Is this all there is to life? There is something wrong with me, with people, with the world; there is something missing in our life. What is it? How did it start?

The loneliness starts from our beginning

I do not claim to know the whole answer; but I am absolutely convinced that a great deal of the modern problems of loneliness, alienation, restless searching, and addictiveness, all of which leads to self-inflicted or other inflicted violence, comes from the way we were brought up and treated from the moment of our conception and that it is centred around our bodies, how they were treated and how we were taught to treat them.

Birth

Starting from this moment and during the next three years, the child gradually becomes aware of itself as a separate self. For the baby, the mother's face acts as a mirror and its development during those first three years is closely tied up with the way the child's mind perceives its own body and how comfortable it is with its body. "I am I" is another birth which takes three years instead of a few hours and which depends to a very real extent of how comfortable the child is with its body.

The infant is a curious, exploring person and uses its touching, feeling, smelling and tasting senses much more than its sight.

How do we treat such an infant who pulls down tablecloths, eats grass and dirt, plays with its genitals? We "correct" them, we slap them, we tell them "don't touch" and in so doing, we do an incredible amount of damage to them, damage that will never be repaired. Full of parental arrogance, we are convinced that we know what is good for the child; as a result, we very often end up by confusing them, making them unsure of themselves and suspicious, and afraid of the world into which they have been catapulted.

For the last fifteen years, I have asked more than 2,000 adolescents in my self-awareness classes: "At what age should you discpline a child?" The vast majority answer: "From birth!" "A child has to learn to wait, that it cannot expect to be fed just because it's hungry, it cannot expect to be cuddled just because it cries." These are the replies which have been embedded in their minds by their own experience of life as well as by seeing how their young brothers and sisters are parented. It is true that by the time they have finished their Adolescent Parenting Programme they have very different ideas but I weep for the tens of thousands who will continue the cycle of violence on their unsuspecting offspring.

Because it is violence you know. Whenever we ignore a baby crying in a crib that is violence; whenever we stop children from exploring the world in which they live that is violence; whenever we gently prevent a child from touching that is violence. Because we are forcing them to suppress a God given urge within them at an age when they cannot understand why they are being treated so violently.

The Yequana Indians of Brazil make sure that their babies are in physical contact with the skin of another human being twenty-four hours a day for the first two years! The result is that these children grow up without the basic split or emptiness in us that is so common to modern man. We moderns spend our lives trying to heal or cope with this emptiness; the Yequanas haven't go it!

If we listened to the cries of the new born babe we would realize that the place for the normal, healthy newborn is with the mother. If we listened to the need of primary school children to express themselves with the guidance of teachers, we could begin to design our primary schools along the lines of the Columbian "Escuela Nueva" in which there is a strong bond between the community and the school which allows children to learn at their own pace. If only we listened to adolescents. If there is one thing that 90 per cent of adolescents complain about, it is that "no one ever really listens to me; parents say they are listening, teachers say they are listening but we know from their body languages, from the way their eyes drift away from me, that they are only going through the motions and waiting patiently for me to stop so that they can tell me about their solution to my problem."

I am strongly suggesting that every programme must be built on a foundation of years of listening and that this listening must continue even when, or should I say especially when, you seem to have come up with a "successful" project.

Today, from a very early age, children are being faced with very stressful situations

Today, from a very early age, children are being faced with very stressful situations and with less and less support from family and societal structures. Because of this it is absolutely essential that parents and educational authorities work together to ensure that the children who emerge from school have a solid sense of their own identity and self-worth which makes them able to cope with a universe that is becoming less friendly by the day. This cannot be achieved by crash programmes in self-esteem for adolescents, *pace* the advocates of quick fixes and band aid solutions but by an awareness of the importance of the early years in the development of personality in small children. If we fail to do this, we can expect a steady increase in the level of violent behaviour exhibited by adolescents. Maybe it is their final, despairing way of pleading witht he adult world:

"Would you please listen to us?"

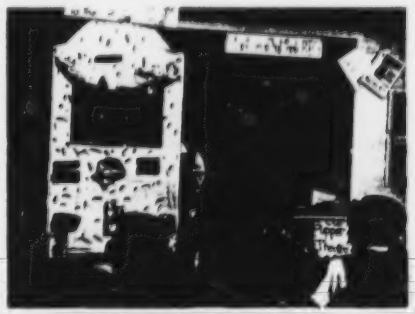
Making it work
FEATURES

Drama in early childhood

In this article extracted from the "ECCE Caribbean" newsletter, Carol Hislop Holder explains the importance of drama in early childhood programmes.

Drama, like all other areas of the Creative Arts Programme, is an essential part of the Early Childhood Curriculum. Drama encourages the child to develop language skills, see sequence of events, build self-esteem, develop social skills and understand the world.

During acting or spontaneous role-playing, children learn social skills: how to get along with others, to share and wait their turn to play their part. They learn to follow directions, or to take initiatives and resolve conflict. Lots of important learning can be fostered through drama. As children play the role of parent or teacher, they see things from another perspective. They step into a role they might eventually play as adults. Pretending to be an adult helps children gain some control over their world and work out fears and frustrations.

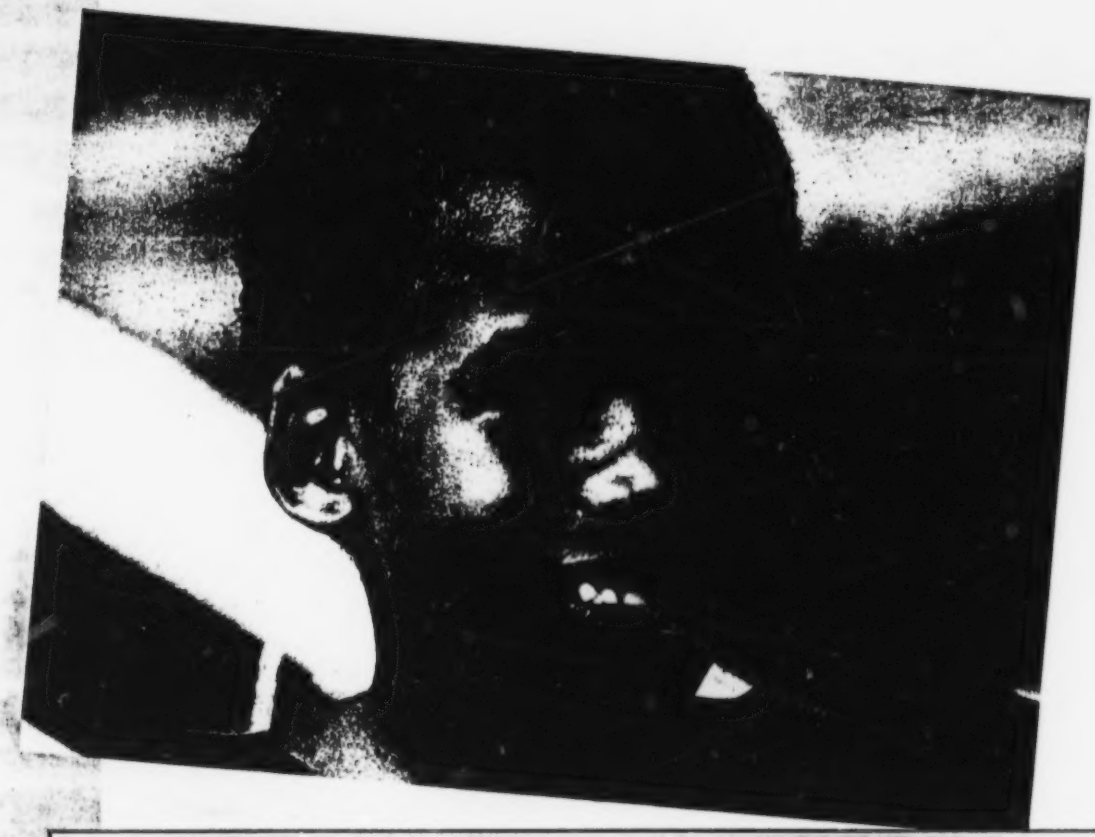


Dramatic play helps children come to terms with uncomfortable feelings. They can pretend going to the doctor, the dentist, a new school, being lost, all of which will help them to cope with these situations. They understand that the doctor and dentist are there to help them; steps to take when they are lost and how to adjust to new situations.

Children gradually discover the world around them during dramatic play. As they gain more information about unfamiliar people and situations they incorporate these into their imaginative play. For instance, the child who goes to the market with a parent might later play the part of a vendor and begin to understand this job more closely. This gives concreteness to abstract ideas.

Drama encourages children to develop creative skills as imagination is required to make up roles, think about ways to act them out, set up situations and solutions. The shy child who takes on a role might start to feel brave and develop self-confidence. Child development specialists agree that children should be encouraged to fantasize. Young children spend a great deal of time pretending, whether we encourage it or not. This seems to be their way of making sense of the people and the world around them.

Drama Activities: Children can act out roles in nursery rhymes read by the teacher. After this the children can play the individual parts in a story they know well. Later on, the children can take on speaking roles. The story is narrated and children will speak when their roles come up. Youngsters and teachers can also dramatize stories using puppets made out of socks, paper bags, toilet rolls or cloth.



Servol Milestones

1970 *In September, Gerard Pantin and Wes Hall go into Laventille. Two months later, Servol was founded*

1971 *Twelve Defence Force personnel join Servol, a nursery school programme begins and a welding institute and medical clinic open*

1972 *Opening of a school for handicapped children and the beginning of a rural development programme*

1973-74 *Opening of plumbing institute and several agricultural projects*

1975 *Opening of several vocational skills institutes*

1976 *Opening of medical clinic, fishing co-operative and handicraft centre*

1977 *Graduation of Servol's first nursery school teachers, opening of child-to-community rural project*

1978 *Official opening of Sunshine Hill Centre and vocational centre at Beetham Estate*

1979 *Drug programme begins at Chaguanas, printing office opens at Sunshine Hill Life Centre*

1980 *Ambulance service begins in rural area. Beetham graduates form their own construction company*

1981 *Beginning of courses at Teacher-Training Centre. Servol voted "Individual of the Year" by Express Newspapers*

1982 *Automechanics established at St. Barb's Life Centre*

1983 *Official opening of Forres Park Life Centre and Caribbean Life Centre*

1984-85 *Establishment of ADP programme and early childhood centres in several Eastern Caribbean islands*

1986 *Government asks Servol to spread its programmes in Trinidad and Tobago.*

1987 *Opening of eight adolescent development centres in Trinidad and Tobago*

1988 *Opening of four further skill training centres and forty early childhood centres*

1989 *Opening of two further Regional Life Centres. Oxford University certifies Servol's Early Childhood Teacher Training Programme*

1990 *Servol represented at World Conference on "Education for All" in Jomtien, Thailand. ADP starts in Juvenille Prison in Trinidad and Tobago.*

1991 *Servol Programme initiated in government secondary school*

1992 *Parent Outreach Programme started*

1993 *Servol represented on Trinidad and Tobago Task Force on Education. Fr. G. Pantin resigns as Executive Director. He is replaced by Sr. Ruth Montrichard*

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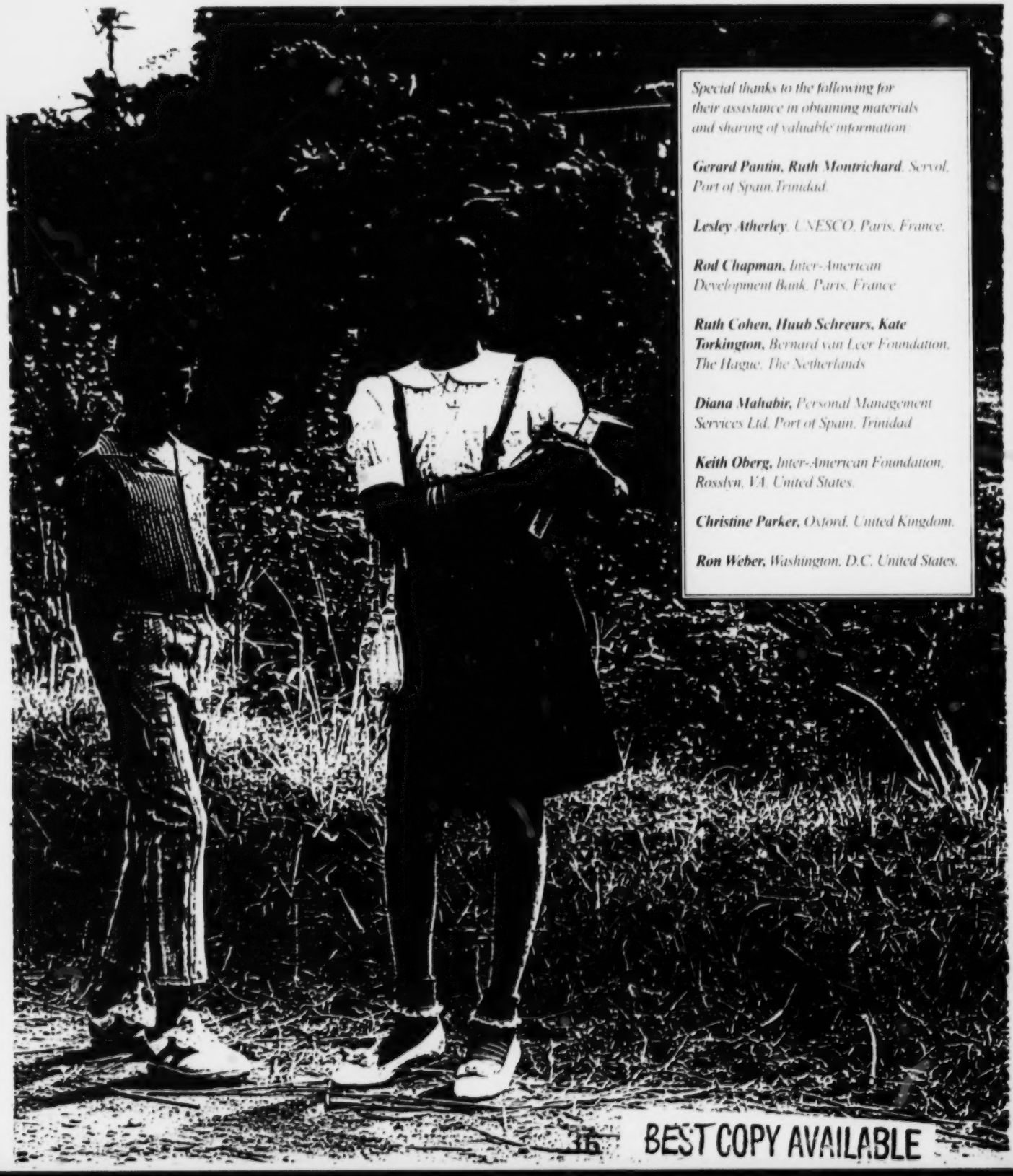

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"The seeds of violence are sown early", says Father Pantin, founder of Service Volunteered for All (Servol), a community organization in Trinidad and Tobago. Born in the aftermath of a social explosion in 1970, Servol has defined its purpose by listening to the marginalized and disadvantaged. By asking the simple question, "How can we help you?" Father Pantin struck up a dialogue with young desperate men and women from the slums. The outcome was two successful programmes: early childhood education for 2 to 5 year-olds, and adolescent development and skills training centres for teenage drop-outs.

In the International Year of the Family 1994, UNESCO's programme *Education for All, Making it Work* has selected Servol as a showcase project because it works on all fronts to rebuild families and give the disadvantaged self-esteem and hope for the future. It does so through its own blend of "tough love" that combines caring with discipline; creates role models and builds community partnerships.

Servol has convincingly demonstrated that the vicious circle of poverty, violence and despair can be broken. The 153 pre-schools for some 5,000 two-to five-year-olds offer a creative curriculum that enables disadvantaged children to be more sociable and speak up in class when starting primary school. Out of the 3,000 teenagers that graduate from the forty adolescent centres every year, 85 per cent succeed in finding a job or finishing secondary school.

Building on local resources, Servol has shown that community members with few formal credentials can become fine educators and trainers. Servol recognizes parents as the primary care-givers and sees education as the whole community's responsibility. Addressing crucial issues, *On the Right Track* is relevant for a broad range of readers: early childhood educators, community development specialists, vocational trainers, and all those working with adolescent drop-outs, both in developing and in industrialized societies.

The editors

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